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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001359

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NSC FOR MGA VIN, LETIM  
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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: SPLM HEAVYWEIGHTS PAGAN AMUM, YASSIR ARMAN  
DETAINED OVER OPPOSITION PROTESTS

Classified By: CDA Robert E. Whitehead, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Two key leaders of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), Secretary General Pagan Amum and Head of SPLM Northern Sector Yassir Arman, were detained by Omdurman authorities in conjunction with an "illegal" protest by opposition parties at the National Assembly on December 7. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director of Bilateral Relations Rahatalla Mohamed Osman explained in a briefing to the heads of the diplomatic corps that the group had not followed lawful procedures and denied that the two had been officially "arrested." GOS officials have assured Charge d'Affaires Whitehead that Amum and Arman would be released by day's end. The GOS security apparatus used force and tear gas to disperse the protesters, which had effectively ended by mid-morning on December 7. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Late last week, the "Juba Alliance" of Sudanese opposition parties announced a planned mass demonstration for December 7 and notified the Government of Sudan (GOS) Ministry of Interior. On the evening of December 6, however, Khartoum State police authorities issued a declaration that the planned demonstrations were "illegal" and warned that anyone participating would be arrested. That same evening, GOS authorities announced the closure of schools and government offices with the stated purpose of allowing citizens to complete voter registration. (Note: December 7 is the last day of the voter registration period in preparation for nationwide elections in April 2010. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) In the early morning hours of December 7, opposition leaders drafted a widely-circulated text message that urged Khartoum residents to join the planned protests. According to eyewitnesses, hundreds of police deployed in Khartoum and Omdurman in advance of the protest, ostensibly to prevent protesters from gathering. At approximately 8:00 a.m., a group of protesters holding banners and chanting opposition slogans assembled outside of the National Assembly in Omdurman. Amun and Arman acted as organizers of the initial protest, and police quickly took them into custody. A member of Amun's staff told poloff and CDA they had been arrested, but the GOS insisted Amun and Arman had been "summoned" to speak with GOS authorities. (Note: During some part of their detention, the two used their cellphones to make statements to the press. At the time of this writing, we have contradictory information on whether they remain in custody. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) While the detentions of Amun and Arman intimidated some protesters, it galvanized a number of others, according to participants and eyewitnesses. GOS army and riot police quickly moved to disperse the crowds. Adil Bakhit, who told poloff he acted as the rally's head of security, stated that

the security forces first attempted to disperse the demonstrators by using truncheons, and followed with the use of tear gas. The protesters began dispersing at approximately 09:20 a.m., he said, and an attempt to return at 10:00 a.m. and continue the demonstration was unsuccessful. By mid-morning, protesters had retreated to Umma party offices, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) offices, and various private residences in Omdurman. Sources reported that GOS army and police presence maintained a heavy presence on the streets of Omdurman by the afternoon of December 7. Government of Southern Sudan President Salva Kiir was scheduled to deliver a public statement on the situation in Khartoum the afternoon of the same day. (Note: Although Juba and Wau saw limited protests related to the arrests of the SPLM leaders, scattered unrest in Juba on December 7 was related to a separate demonstration against the non-payment of teachers' salaries. End note.)

15. (C) At noon on December 7, The GOS summoned diplomatic corps chiefs of mission for a briefing at the MFA. In a prime example of doublespeak, MFA Director of Regional and Multilateral Relations Rahatalla Mohamed Osman explained that while the Juba Alliance of opposition parties had submitted a notification to hold a protest to the Ministry of Interior 72 hours in advance of the protest, this was in fact insufficient; he claimed that because the Juba Alliance was not a political party per se, it was required to submit its request to the Wali (Governor) of Khartoum State in accordance with Article 25 of the Political Parties Act, which they had failed to do. He continued that Article 127 of the Criminal Procedures Act of 1991 allowed authorities to intervene with any attempt to disturb public peace. Osman

KHARTOUM 00001359 002.3 OF 002

further denied that Amun and Arman had been arrested, noting they had parliamentary immunity. He also pointed out that they were allowed to keep their mobile phones, a fact testified to by the various interviews with international press given by Amun during his "arrest." GOS sources at the MFA and Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin assured CDA that Amun and Arman would be released by day's end.

16. (C) Comment: The Juba Alliance, spearheaded by the two outspoken SPLM officials, has successfully raised the stakes in the increasingly tense pre-election game, and now the GOS appears to be trying to downplay the incident following the overreaction from its security forces, probably spurred on by some as yet unidentified hard-liner, which has played into the hands of the SPLM Northern Sector, and will surely galvanize the regime's opponents in the international community. Rumors abound, and we will report further when we have winnowed the truth from the gossip. End comment.  
WHITEHEAD